

***Letter to Interior Secretary Salazar Urges More Responsible Alternative***

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) this week sent a letter to Interior Secretary Ken Salazar opposing a drilling plan in northeastern Utah that would devastate Desolation Canyon, a nationally important wilderness area that is home to spectacular, but sensitive, landscapes. The letter signed by several other key House Democrats, including Reps. Ed Markey (D-MA), Raul Grijalva (D-AZ), Jim Moran (D-VA), Rush Holt (D-NJ), and Diana DeGette (D-CO), urged the adoption of an alternative plan that would allow the vast majority of drilling activity to move forward, while protecting important wilderness areas..

"The wild public lands of Desolation Canyon are a national treasure that belong to the American people and should be protected for generations to come," said Hinchey. "What we are asking for is that 1,100 wells be drilled instead of 1,300. By making this modest adjustment we can preserve Desolation Canyon and the surrounding wilderness areas. What took millions of years for nature to create should not be destroyed by an irresponsible decision at the Department of the Interior. I am hopeful Secretary Salazar will make the right decision and protect the wild lands of Desolation Canyon."

Multiple drilling scenarios were examined in a recently released Bureau of Land Management environmental impact statement. The preferred alternative of BLM would allow approximately 1,300 wells to be drilled, disturbing 9,466 Wilderness acres. The plan endorsed by Hinchey and his colleagues would allow 1,100 wells to be drilled without any significant disturbance to wilderness acres.

The full text of the [letter](#) follows.

Honorable Ken Salazar  
United States Department of the Interior  
1849 C St. NW  
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We are writing to you to express our concern over the effects on wilderness of the preferred alternative identified in the recently released Gasco final environmental impact statement. Under the Department's current preferred alternative for this project, a substantial portion of the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness – an area the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and conservation groups agree is a wilderness caliber landscape – could be devastated. This iconic western landscape is a key component of H.R. 1916, America's Red Rock Wilderness Act, a piece of legislation we have long championed and that enjoys substantial support in the Congress. Protecting this area is a matter of preeminent importance to us.

Though the BLM recognizes that Desolation Canyon is a wilderness resource, the area is managed under a significantly flawed plan finalized in the last administration and those values are not being upheld. You, Deputy Secretary Hayes and Director Abbey have all stated publicly that the decisions made in the Vernal resource management plan regarding wilderness – made without the benefit of any wilderness guidance whatsoever – should not be the final word on how to manage this critical resource. "Alternative E" would protect the Desolation Canyon proposed wilderness while still allowing significant natural gas development. According to the BLM, under "Alternative E," the company would drill 1,114 new natural gas wells, compared with 1,298 under the agency's preferred alternative. Therefore, we urge you to select "Alternative E" for the Gasco project, which will better balance the need to protect these special areas while allowing for the responsible development of our natural gas resources.

In its comments on the draft environmental impact statement, the Environmental Protection Agency urged the BLM to adopt Alternative E because it would allow the company to aggressively develop its leases while minimizing the project's footprint. Alternative E is also the choice of Utah's important outdoor recreation industry, conservation organizations, and thousands of Americans, including many of our constituents.

Most importantly, Alternative E is consistent with the President's commitment to develop our nation's natural gas resources in a way that does not sacrifice clean air, clean water, or our wild public lands. We fully support that commitment which is best embodied by this win-win alternative.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey